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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 001934

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/20/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: A/S FRIED'S MEETING WITH NA SPEAKER BAGHDASARIAN

Classified By: Amb. John M. Evans for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) During his October 18 meeting with National Assembly Speaker Artur Baghdasarian, Assistant Secretary Fried discussed democratic reform in the South Caucasus, Armenia's relationship with Russia and regional security. A/S Fried urged Armenia to accelerate democratic reforms and closer relations with Europe. Complaints from Moscow notwithstanding, neither of these goals should be seen as adverse to Armenia's strong relations with Russia.

USG Participants:

EUR Assistant Secretary Daniel Fried  
Ambassador John Evans  
Ambassador Steven Mann  
EUR/SNEC Deputy Director Elizabeth Rood  
Yerevan Pol/Econ notetaker

End Summary.

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"HISTORY IS ACCELERATING"  
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2. (C) Commenting that "history is accelerating," A/S Fried noted that not only are forces of reform more active throughout the region, but also forces of reaction. Commenting that "I don't hide that we support forces of reform," A/S Fried continued to reassure Baghdasarian that the USG does not support revolution, although reform and democracy "is on everyone's mind in a way it wasn't three to four years ago." Pointing out that reform is what people talk about in Washington, Fried told Baghdasarian that he was in Yerevan "because Armenian/American relations can develop faster than they have." "We want to see Armenia develop as a partner in this part of the world," Fried said.

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NOT IN COMPETITION WITH RUSSIA  
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3. (C) While acknowledging Armenia's "unique attribute," its genuine friendship with Russia for historical reasons, Fried urged Armenia to develop stronger ties with Europe and the U.S. "We will never tell you that you have to choose. What the Russians tell you is up to them." While Fried commented that Russia "sometimes thinks we are trying to surround them," in reality the USG has more important issues than trying to surround Russia with democratic countries. Baghdasarian noted, however, that Russian influence would inevitably decline as Armenia acts on its need to enhance its relations with the U.S. and improve Euro-Atlantic cooperation. Nonetheless, he noted, having good relations with Russia "does not mean they're masters."

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DEMOCRATIC, CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS HIGH ON THE AGENDA  
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4. (C) Agreeing that "serious democratic reforms in Armenia and the region" are necessary, Baghdasarian told Fried that Armenia is making progress, but needs to take "decisive steps." According to Baghdasarian, Armenia needs to continue its reforms because "those people who create obstacles to reform are creating pre-revolutionary conditions." Not everyone in Armenia understands the necessity of reform, Baghdasarian claimed, noting that Armenia struggles between the future and the past. Constitutional reforms, he insisted, were very important in this context. In order to decentralize power (something Baghdasarian was advocating) Armenia needs to reduce presidential power while giving a larger role to parliament. Fried agreed that a strong parliament was critical, because otherwise corruption "won't stop."

5. (C) Noting that "many favor reforms unless they touch on their interests," Baghdasarian acknowledged that the process was a challenging one. After 18 months of work the GOAM has come up with a draft constitution that is approved by the international community, "we need a free and fair referendum" Baghdasarian insisted. Baghdasarian underlined the

importance of a free society, claiming that, as part of the younger generation, "this is our thinking, this is our approach."

16. (C) Pointing out that the current constitution creates obstacles to reforms, Baghdasarian noted that Armenia needs a good legal framework if it is to combat corruption. Bad laws, he said, create "ample ground" for corruption. Although Baghdasarian noted that the GOAM is taking some measures against corruption, he cited the "need to redouble efforts" because society was unsatisfied. Fighting corruption, Fried agreed, was "good politics" -- people would vote for politicians they think are clean.

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REGIONAL SECURITY KEY  
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17. (C) Baghdasarian told Fried that he saw the future of Armenia in good relations with its neighbors. (Note: Baghdasarian mentioned a speech he plans to give at a local university soon on the topic of Armenian/Turkish relations. End Note.) According to Baghdasarian, if Armenia has "permanent bad relations" with its neighbors it will be unable to develop further. "There is a train taking Turkey to the EU, why are we standing on the rails? We need to take our place on that train." The healthy part of society, Baghdasarian said, realizes that Armenia needs a healthy, open dialogue with Turkey. The way to solve problems, he insisted, is to have a dialogue, and he mentioned his own cooperation with his Turkish counterpart in this context. Noting that Armenia could make serious progress with Turkey only after N-K was somehow resolved, Fried pointed out that Turkey was "beginning to think in new ways about its history with Armenia."

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HOPE AND CONFIDENCE ON N-K  
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18. (C) Insisting that, "In the long run, democracy will equal peace," Baghdasarian told Fried that he thought the parties were "very close to a solution to the N-K conflict." Noting that in 2006, following successful elections in Azerbaijan and preceding the next elections in Armenia, there will be a window of opportunity for solving the conflict, Baghdasarian emphasized that the Role of the U.S. would be very important in creating a democratic South Caucasus with no conflicts and with a free market.

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"EUROPE WILL CATCH UP WITH YOU"  
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19. (C) If Armenia focuses on necessary democratic and other reforms, Europe will catch up, Fried noted. Baghdasarian agreed, and claimed that the "extension of the EU is inevitable; this region is a matter of interest and of concern, but of growing interest."

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DEMOCRATIC ARMENIA A STRONG ARMENIA  
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10. (C) Commenting that he would borrow A/S Fried's quote that "A democratic Armenia would be a stronger Armenia," Baghdasarian acknowledged that there is a need to educate Armenian society on these principles, and noted that the more legitimate the government, the more confident the government, and then Armenia could move to solve N-K. Everything, Baghdasarian insisted, "depends on fair elections."

11. (U) EUR/FO has cleared this message.  
EVANS